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Title: Kentucky's goat numbers take a leap

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Writer: Allen Blair

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Danielle Adkins has a few more goats than she used to these days.

That's no surprise, considering it's "kidding" season on her Lawrence County farm, when a lot of young goats are scampering about.

And the situation's the same around much of the country as goat farming continues to be an increasingly popular alternative to tobacco and other practices.

The all goat inventory in the United States, reported to be 2.83 million head, rose 4 percent from 2.72 million in 2005, the U.S. Department of Agriculture said. Inventory of meat goats and all other goats experienced the largest percentage of growth, increasing 5 percent from last year to 2.26 million head.

In Kentucky, goat inventory rose from 68,000 head in 2002 to 70,000 last year.

"Nobody's making a huge profit," Adkins says, speaking for herself and many in the Lawrence County Goat Association, of which she's president.

"But, everybody's pleased and the outlook looks good," she said.

In fact, the University of Kentucky reported recently in its "Kentucky Agricultural Economic Outlook for 2006" that not only were farm receipts expected to set a new record this year, possibly as high as \$4.14 billion, but also the "goat market will continue to be strong, following the other meats with continued strength of demand and growing ethnic populations."

Last year, production expanded modestly and prices were strong with highest prices from December to May. The benchmark price of 40- to 60-pound kids set in Texas three years ago at \$98 per hundredweight increased to \$123 per hundredweight, university agriculture economists said.

This year, prices should average in the \$120s with the same typical seasonal patterns,

although many producers will not likely receive such prices due to a poorly developed market system, they said.

“However, those who participate in the ‘Graded and Tel-O-Auction’ sales can expect very competitive prices,” economists predict.

While they’ve been in Kentucky for a number of years but at smaller numbers, goats have enjoyed a growing reputation in recent years - something that the Kentucky Goat Producers Association attributes to the popularity of meat breeds, the increase in various ethnic populations within the U.S. and the decline of tobacco production in Kentucky.

“More and more small farm owners have seen how well dairy and meat goats fit into their diversification plans and the goat population in the Commonwealth has multiplied exponentially,” it says.

For more information, visit www.kentuckygpa.com.

Meanwhile, beef also seems to be growing in popularity nationwide among producers, the USDA said.

Inventory of all cattle and calves in the United States totaled 97.1 million head as of Jan. 1, up 2 percent from 95.4 million a year ago. This increase represents the second straight year of herd expansion after nearly a decade of declining cattle inventories, it said.

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